What is claimed is:

1.   1.   A method of improving installation of software packages, comprising steps of:

2   assigning a weight to each of one or more selected values of one or more installation

3   parameters associated with a software product installation;

4   determining a plurality of potential target systems on which the software product

5   installation might be performed;

6   identifying a routine to analyze each of the installation parameters;

7   programmatically interrogating each of the potential target systems for its status of each of

8   the installation parameters, using the identified routines; and

9   using the assigned weights, in combination with the selected values and the status of each

10   of the installation parameters, to compute a suitability assessment for each of the potential target

11   systems.

1   2.   The method according to Claim 1, wherein the programmatically interrogating step further

2   comprises the step of invoking the identified routines at each of the potential target systems.

1   3.   The method according to Claim 1, wherein the using step further comprises the steps of:

2   comparing the status of each of the installation parameters to the selected values to

3   determine the associated weight to be used for this installation parameter for this potential target

4   system; and

5   adding the determined weights to yield the computed suitability assessment for this

6   potential target system.

7   4.   The method according to Claim 1, further comprising the step of ranking the potential

8   target systems according to their suitability assessments.

1   5.   The method according to Claim 4, further comprising the step of providing the ranking to

2   a software installer.

1   6.   The method according to Claim 5, wherein the software installer is a person and wherein

2   the providing step comprises the step of displaying the ranking on a graphical user interface.

1   7.   The method according to Claim 5, wherein the software installer is a programmatic

2   process and wherein the providing step further comprises the step of supplying the ranking to the

3   programmatic process in a machine-readable form.

1   8.   The method according to Claim 1, wherein the assigned weights and selected values are

2   specified using a structured markup language.

1   9.   The method according to Claim 8, wherein the structured markup language is Extensible

2   Markup Language ("XML") or a derivative thereof.

1   10.   The method according to Claim 1, wherein the assigned weights, the selected values, and

2   the identifications of the routines are specified using a structured markup language.

1   11.   The method according to Claim 19, wherein the specifications are part of an installation

2   object defined for the software product installation.

1   12.   The method according to Claim 1, wherein the interrogating step further comprising the

2   step of transmitting a message to each of the potential target systems, wherein the message

3   specifies the identified routines.

1   13.   The method according to Claim 12, wherein the message is to be processed by an

2   installation agent residing on each of the potential target systems.

1   14.   The method according to Claim 12, further comprising the steps of:

2   receiving the transmitted message at a particular one of the potential target systems;

3   invoking the identified routines from the received message, thereby determining the status

4   of each of the installation parameters for this particular potential target system; and

5   returning the status of each of the installation parameters in a response message.

1   15.   The method according to Claim 5, further comprising the step of using the provided

2   ranking, by the software installer, to select one or more of the potential target systems as one or

3   more actual target systems for the software product installation.

1   16.   The method according to Claim 15, further comprising the steps of:

2   distributing a software installation package for the software product installation to each of

3   the selected actual target systems; and

4   performing the software product installation on the selected actual target systems.

1   17.   The method according to Claim 12, wherein the specified routines in the transmitted

2   message are encoded using a structured markup language.

1   18.   The method according to Claim 14, wherein the status of each of the installation

2   parameters in the response message is encoded using a structured markup language.

1   19.   The method according to Claim 16, further comprising the step of configuring the

2   software installation package prior to operation of the distributing step.

1   20.   The method according to Claim 19, wherein the configuring step further comprises

2   reflecting the status for at least one of the installation parameters in the configured software

3   installation package.

1   21.   A system for improving installation of software packages, comprising:

2   means for determining a plurality of potential target systems on which the software

3   product installation might be performed;

4   means for programmatically interrogating each of the potential target systems for its status

5   of each of one or more installation parameters associated with a software product installation, by

6   invoking, at each of the potential target systems, a routine which is identified for analyzing that

7 installation parameter; and

8   means for using weights which are assigned to each of one or more selected values of the

9   one or more installation parameters, in combination with the selected values and the status of each

10 of the installation parameters, to compute a suitability assessment for each of the potential target

11 systems.

1   22.   The system according to Claim 21, further comprising means for ranking the potential

target systems according to their suitability assessments.

23.   The system according to Claim 22, further comprising means for providing the ranking to

a software installer.

24.   A computer program product for improving installation of software packages, the

2   computer program product embodied on one or more computer-readable media and comprising:

3   computer-readable program code means for determining a plurality of potential target

4   systems on which the software product installation might be performed;

5   computer-readable program code means for programmatically interrogating each of the

6   potential target systems for its status of each of one or more installation parameters associated

7   with a software product installation, by invoking, at each of the potential target systems, a

8   routine which is identified for analyzing that installation parameter; and

9   computer-readable program code means for using weights which are assigned to each of

10 one or more selected values of the one or more installation parameters, in combination with the

11   selected values and the status of each of the installation parameters, to compute a suitability

12   assessment for each of the potential target systems.

1   25.   The computer program product according to Claim 24, wherein the computer-readable

2   program code means for using further comprises:

3   computer-readable program code means for comparing the status of each of the

4   installation parameters to the selected values to determine the associated weight to be used for

5   this installation parameter for this potential target system; and

6   computer-readable program code means for adding the determined weights to yield the

7   computed suitability assessment for this potential target system.

1   26.   The computer program product according to Claim 24, further comprising

2   computer-readable program code means for ranking the potential target systems according to

3   their suitability assessments.

1   27.   The computer program product according to Claim 24, wherein the potential target

2   systems are remotely-located.

1   28.   A method of improving installation of software packages, comprising steps of:

2   assigning a weight to each of one or more selected values of one or more installation

3   parameters associated with installation of a plurality of software products;

4   determining a plurality of potential target systems on which the installation of the software

5   products might be performed;

6   identifying a routine to analyze each of the installation parameters;

7   programmatically interrogating each of the potential target systems for its status of each of

8   the installation parameters, using the identified routines; and

9   using the assigned weights, in combination with the selected values and the status of each

10   of the installation parameters, to compute a suitability assessment for each of the potential target

11   systems.